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TASK FORCE FROM V CORPS' 1ST INFANTRY DIVISION WORKS TO LEAVE A BETTER, SAFER IRAQ THAN WHEN IT ARRIVED

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TIKRIT, Iraq — As Iraqi Security Forces prepare for upcoming elections and their eventual control of security operations in Tikrit, Soldiers of V Corps' Task Force 1st Battalion, 18th Infantry continue to improve quality of life for Iraqi citizens in their area of operations and ensure good relations for the task force's replacement units from the 42nd Infantry Division of the New York National Guard.

Initiatives to improve in the area's economy, local living conditions and local security are leaving a positive impact on Tikrit citizens.

"We have several programs ongoing to fulfill the promises we made to the local leaders ... It also helps develop a population that is unwilling to harbor insurgents," said Capt. Tim Crowe, the task force's civil-military operations officer.

Cooperative local residents have provided several tips that resulted in raids in the sector controlled by the 1st Infantry Division task force. The 1/18th's Charlie Company, Task Force has captured more than 15 terror cell financiers in the Tikrit area. North of Tikrit, Bravo Company, 1/18th captured a large cache of hand-thrown improvised explosive devices and rocket-propelled grenades. In Owja, Alpha

Company, 1/18th captured more than 30 insurgents and thousands of artillery shells from a terrorist cell responsible for several attacks along the 1st Infantry Division's north-south main supply route and attacks on local Iraqi security forces.

"I think the best way of preventing Owja from becoming a terrorist safe haven is to actively go after the insurgents and their tools for IEDs," said

Capt. David Kryczki, the Alpha Company commander. These raids have seriously damaged the insurgency in the Tikrit area and help set the stage for security both for the task force's replacements and the scheduled January elections.

While continuing aggressive security operations, Task Force 1-18 is also using the Tikrit Job Corps to help fight chronic unemployment here. The program provides jobs for 400 people living throughout their area of operations and helps prevent insurgents from gaining influence with local residents who might otherwise rely on the enemy for money in exchange for sanctuary.

Local leaders are grateful for the economic boost to their communities and understand the impact of this program. Sheik Shalon, the leader of the Mukasheefa area, expressed his gratitude by saying "jobs are crucial for not only our economy, but also our security. Thank you so much."

The task force has also placed significant emphasis on improving economic and living conditions locally through several other projects:

-- Using Commander's Emergency Relief Program funds, task force officials contracted 15 new construction projects at the University of Tikrit in December.

-- The battalion's physician assistant and medical platoon leader helped distribute more than \$150,000 worth of medical equipment to the Tikrit teaching hospital.

-- In Owja, the Al Shebebea School was refurbished with new windows, paint and several structural improvements. Also in Owja, Alpha Company opened a new playground with lights, fountains, and playground equipment.

-- In Tikrit, Charlie Company completed a new soccer field that contains lighting, changing rooms and bleachers.

In all the task force has more than 60 projects worth more than \$12 million in progress that will continue to pay the salaries for thousands of contractors, vendors, and laborers for much of 2005.

Crowe summed up the 1/18th's programs by saying that the task force has accomplished its mission here, reaching the goals it set for itself and handing over their area of operations knowing the stage is set for elections and that their replacements take on an Iraq better than it was when the 1st Infantry Division arrived.

